



PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

“WHERE DO I FIND THE PEOPLE THAT WILL BRING ME NEW WORK? WHAT NETWORKING SKILLS DO I NEED?”

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December 2010

Lawyers say to me “I have exhausted all my friends, what do I do now? Who do I network with, where do I find them and how do I do it?”

You can find people that will bring you new work in 5 categories:

1. Close to you – family and friends are the first people you develop relationships with so they are good to practice on. But think also of friends of friends and acquaintances. It may feel uncomfortable selling to friends so be assured that it is about being liked, respected and building relationships. It is not about trying to sell i.e. saying how good you are and talking at people. Also, because you are a good lawyer and are part of a good firm, you are letting people down if you do not make them aware of how you can help them, should they or who they know ever need help.
2. Randomly – talk to anybody, everywhere, all the time. It is good practise for the networking skills which I have described below. It can and does lead to new work. I have known lawyers receive instructions after conversations on trains, aeroplanes, in swimming pools and on ski lifts! Even if such conversations do not result in instructions, they can result in great discussions and generate thought-provoking ideas.
3. Your current clients – they are important to all lawyers, but particularly to Private Client lawyers and to those who serve High Net Worth individuals, families and their estates. Providing high quality work, being affable and accessible is the basis. But lawyers are often instructed by word of mouth and so your current clients are essential ambassadors for you and your firm.
4. Sector organisations of your clients – your clients work in sectors and may be members of local, regional, national or international organisations for their work. These may be, for example, Real Estate organisations, Tax or Employment. Therefore, attend, participate in and join committees in these organisations to raise your profile.

5. Organisations of which your clients, referrers and intermediaries are members because of their interests – by joining these you have the opportunity to build relationships outside of your role as a lawyer. These can be at several levels: local, such as being on a school governing board. Interest in participating in these is growing strongly. Other local organisations include: the Rotary Club, local charities, local hospitals and institutions. Regional organisations might include county councils, environmental organisations and regional government offices. Become involved on a government or national scale by creating a profile so that you become a recognised authority and hence involved in consultations.

Networking skills you need are to:

1. Be interested and interesting

You need to like people, be interested in them, be interesting about yourself (e.g. do not say “I do Tax Law which is very boring”) and always look for ways to help people or make them feel good. For example, at an event, when you want to move on, do not leave a person on their own, but introduce them to somebody interesting.

2. Be well organised

I have developed the P-I-F approach. This is essential to make your networking productive.

P stands for Plan – which events are valuable for you to go to; who might be there; who you would like to meet and think about contacting them beforehand to suggest meeting up.

I stand for Implement – set yourself targets of 5 new people to meet as well as 5 you know.

F stands for Follow-up – you need to incorporate this into any activity or event. It is really difficult, if you have been out of office for even half a day, as the chargeable work piles up and you need to do it when you return.

However, it is better to attend fewer events using the P-I-F approach rather than many and not following up.

3. Remembering peoples' names

A person's name is the most important word to them. If you use a phrase like, “I am no good at remembering people's names” when they are introduced, the implication is that you do not care about them and are not interested in them. It is therefore very important that you try very hard to remember the name of everybody you meet. In my book, “Networking for lawyers: the pocket guide to building business relationships”, which is published in December 2010, I give 16 tips on how to remember peoples' names.

Three ideas to remember names are firstly: to say their name as soon as you are introduced to them and say, "Hello (name)". Secondly: use their name intermittently throughout the conversation which will help you to remember it. Thirdly: at the end of the conversation, to ask for somebody's business card and although you might have forgotten their name throughout the conversation, you will be able to look at the card, remind yourself of the conversation, the person's face and that will help to remember their name.

4. Ask questions

The reassuring aspect of networking for lawyers is that you do not have to do too much talking. "Telling isn't selling but listening is". We were given two ears and one mouth to enable us to listen more than we talk. To encourage people to talk, you may ask open questions: who, what, why, when, how, how much, where? If you ask open questions with superlatives, then that encourages people to enjoy the conversation as well. For example, "What was the most interesting aspect of the matter which you are dealing with at the moment?" and "What was the most challenging aspect of climbing Mt Everest?"

5. Listen to answers

If you are not comfortable with networking, it is tempting to wait until somebody has finished talking for you then to say the next thing that you want to say. It is important to listen to what somebody is talking to you about and to respond to what they say. Let the conversation flow in the direction that they want to take it rather than to keep in line with the questions that you might have thought about asking.

6. Look for ways to continue to develop the relationship

Networking is the beginning of developing relationships. Therefore, with each person that you meet and feel that you have something in common with them; look for ways to develop the relationship. This may be sending them a follow-up email; may be suggesting coffee; may be asking them to join your LinkedIn network; may be introducing them to somebody else. Networking for lawyers is about looking for ways to help people as part of building this relationship.

7. Keep your promises – do what you say you will in the time you said you would do it

Networking is an opportunity to demonstrate to potential new clients the way in which you would provide legal services. Therefore, it is important to convey the message that you are reliable. When you make a commitment, in order to help you take the relationship forward, for example, telephoning somebody or sending them an article that you have read, it is important that you keep this commitment and do everything you say you will by the time you say you will do it.

8. Diarise everything

When you return from an event or when you have met somebody, make a note on the back of their business card about where you met, the location, what you talked about and any commitment you made. Put the information from your business cards (within the bounds of the Data Protection Act) into your personal and/or central database.

Diarise any commitments you have made or any dates which you may need to remember in the future. This may include (within the bounds of the Data Protection Act) birthdays, anniversaries or dates that particular individual is going away and where they are going to. This reminds you that in the next conversation, you can ask them how the holiday was or if you ring up on their birthday, wish them happy birthday.

Conclusion

In order to make the most of the organisations in which your potential clients are, you need to analyse how you currently win new work and new clients. You may feel that you have exhausted these particular sources and therefore it is important for you to move on to new organisations and locations, or you may feel that you have not looked hard enough within these organisations to develop relationships and therefore, prioritise and take a more active role.

By prioritising, focusing your efforts, having a structured and systematic approach, combined with fine-tuning your networking skills, this should ensure that you make the most of the time you invest in marketing and business development activities.



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December 2010

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